

EDUCATION

The Bureaucratic Imagination

Krishna Kumar

THE Ministry of Education and Social Welfare has released a document called 'Trends in Educational Expenditure' which covers the period from 1968-69 to 1978-79. As the foreword explains, the document is concerned mainly with 'governmental inputs'. Although state inputs do play a major role in educational financing, an influential role — the magnitude of which is not known precisely;— is played by private inputs. As long as our information about resources spent on education is restricted to the public exchequer, and as long as this restricted information is accepted as the overall picture, no significantly new insights about the political and economic infrastructure of education in the country can develop. Unless, for instance, we have financial details about unaided private institutions (including the so-called public schools), the expenses incurred by rich parents on private tuition (now widely advertised as the basis of three-fourths or more of positions in merit lists), educational gadgets, and out-of-school activities, we will not know much about the precise class distribution of resources spent in the country on education. In the absence of such knowledge, documentation and critiques of educational financing will continue to regurgitate the familiar figures of GNP proportion spent on education, per capita expenditure, estimates and actual expenditures, and so on. It is mostly data of these types that the new Ministry document provides.

Systematic data of private expenditure on education in India are scarce. The role of privately made expenditure is ignored in educational research, usually on the assumption that such expenditure must be insignificant compared to public expenditure. Whatever the validity of such an assumption, it is not difficult to see that by overlooking the need to document private expenditure, educational data-officers conform to an established tradition of social research. Under this tradition, the mass society is seen as the proper domain of research. The rich need not be researched, because they are not perceived to be a source of problems that social research is supposed to help the state in solving. The rich in India undoubtedly make far greater

private expenditure on an individual basis for the education of their children than the poor do. Indeed, the poor do spend on textbooks and notebooks—even at the levels of education where it is called 'free'. These private expenses are never included in financial data provided by the government. But the expenditure made by the rich in the name of their children's education has a far wider range. The number of rich people may be small compared to the total population, but their behaviour plays a key role in determining structural relationships within the society. By overlooking the private expenditure made by the rich, the Ministry of Education has risked the validity of the 'trends' it hopes to show in the present document.

Private sources, such as endowments, participate in a small way in the funding of legally common institutions, and this participation is covered by the Ministry document. In 1950-51, such private contributions accounted for 11.6 per cent of the total educational expenditure in the country. In 1978-79, this proportion was reduced to 3 per cent. This decline was greater than the decline registered in the proportions of local board funds and fees. Why do private sources account for a smaller proportion of the education budget now than they did three decades ago? One reason may be that private money is now spent mainly to support a parallel educational system. The little that private entrepreneurs do spend on common educational institutions forms only a fraction of the overall expenditure on these institutions, the bulk being paid by the government. Yet, the names of these institutions continue to glorify local merchants and their wives. The government has failed to develop a system whereby privately managed institutions could be held accountable to the public. Managerial malpractices lead the staff to demand 'nationalisation', which usually means that teachers' salaries would have to come directly from the state treasury.

The proportion of local board funds declined during 1950-78 from 10.9 to 5 per cent and that of fees from 20.4 to 12 per cent. The decline in the share of municipalities reflects the general decline of the municipal system in the country over the last two de-

CADES. Despite the regular lip-service that has been paid to locally governed schooling, the fiscal resources and the decision-making power of local boards has diminished. It is a matter of little wonder, therefore, that areas dependent on local resources, including pre-school and out-of-school activities, have not only failed to grow but have actually shrunk in terms of the proportion of total child-population served. It is the children of poor and oppressed classes who have suffered most due to this decline of locally provided services, reflected in matters like the provision of space and material structures for play. Several municipalities now simply overlook their role in providing children's services. The middle class pays no attention to this since it is busy taking advantage of the existing, and establishing new, networks of private services for its children.

The share of fees in the total money available for public education is relevant mainly to post-secondary education. At this level, students from the poorest — including the protected — sections of society form a small proportion because the rate of dropping out of the system is very high among the economically oppressed classes. As an editorial article in the *Journal of Higher Education* (Autumn, 1975) noted, "India's 4 per cent of the relevant age group at college come out of the less than 30 per cent who have completed secondary schooling." Out of every 100 children who enrol in class 1, only 25 reach class 8, and out of the 10 who reach the last grade level at school, at least 4 fail in the final examination. This pattern should indicate the actual sphere of higher education in India. Yet, higher education is heavily subsidised by public funds in the name of democratisation of a traditionally elite privilege. One is told that college education is the only way for many students from poor backgrounds to improve their career prospects. One is also told that the rate of return from higher education is greater for poor students than it is for well-off students. Liberal analysts argue that higher education has been transformed from a "relatively small, elite system to a large, popular one" (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1972). The term 'popular' is used in such analyses to characterise the expansion of middle class interests. This amorphous term is used by commentators of all ideological shades to justify the heavy subsidies spent on higher education. The fact that a large section of our modern

TABLE: BUDGETED EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION (REVENUE ACCOUNT)
(Rupees in crore. Figures for 1978-79 are estimates.)

States	Elementary		Secondary		Higher	
	1968-69	1978-79	1968-69	1978-79	1968-69	1978-79
Bihar	19.3	90.1	3.2	27.7	3.3	21.8
Uttar Pradesh	27.0	134.3	3.2	27.7	3.3	21.8
Kerala	28.6	92.6	9.8	42.8	2.3	17.8
Maharashtra	31.6	109.4	24.8	79.9	4.6	30.2

middle class now spends more on school education for its children than on college education is conveniently ignored. As J P Naik observed in conversation, it is at the top that we have a common school.

Jean Floud [1975, p 208] points out that "to obtain the maximum equalising effect from a given amount of public educational resources, the distribution must be not only independent of, but negatively related to the distribution of inherited inequalities of fortune". What our higher education system does, as Azad [1976] points out, is to give large subsidies "indiscriminately to the affluent and non-affluent section alike". The subsidies that are spent on higher education hurt the fiscal strength available for elementary education, an area where expansion and improvement would benefit the most oppressed sections of society, and other areas like adult education where almost no infrastructure exists on a wide scale. The accompanying Table, constructed on the basis of data given in the Ministry document, shows the increase in expenditure at three levels of education between 1968-69 and 1978-79 in four states, the first two of which are educationally underdeveloped while the other two are relatively developed.

While the expenditure on higher education in the country taken as a whole increased nearly 5 times (at current prices) as opposed to 4 times in the case of elementary education between 1968-69 and 1978-79 the gap between the increase in expenditure on these two levels was much wider in largely illiterate states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, not simply in a literate state like Kerala. The increase in Kerala can be understood in view of the greater capacity displayed by the school system there to retain students. One might expect that schools in Kerala drop fewer children on purely economic grounds than schools in other states do, and

therefore that the college system is expand'nn with some increase in the participation of some oppressed groups of society. Such an expectation cannot be valid for the country as a whole, and it would certainly be quite invalid for states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. There the increase in higher education expenditure can only indicate that the dominant sections of society are demanding more facilities for higher education.

In a purely functional sense, the increase in higher education funding is related to the increase in undergraduate level enrolments. Elementary and secondary level school enrolments have been increasing at a slower pace than undergraduate and postgraduate level enrolments. The government may still be quite far from accomplishing the aim articulated in the Constitution of providing free education to all children in the 6-14 age group; yet, expansion of elementary and middle level schooling facilities has slowed down, while college seats continue to be increased. Enrolment is the main concern of the bureaucratic imagination which plans Indian education. Quality and standards must do with lip-service; the real worth of a sector and its eligibility for resources are determined by its size,

How large is the adult education sector? The infrastructure of the sector has remained so badly underdeveloped that no valid estimates can yet be made of its size. Indeed, it is due to the lack of an infrastructure that funds provided for adult education often remain underutilised. Throughout the 10-year period covered by the Ministry document, the proportion of actual expenditure in relation to budget estimates was consistently less than 100 per cent. In 1972-73, this percentage was as low as 37.8. Expenditure on adult education has been less than 1 per cent of the country's total educational expenditure. What little is spent on this systematically neglected sector mostly goes

under 'plan' expenditure, the 'non-plan' or maintenance expenditure being negligible. The sector has no permanent structures, so the money allotted for it disappears into sporadic programmes that show no tangible results.

In Indian educational financing, 'plan' and 'non-plan' are two important categories of expenditure. Developmental effort is met through 'plan' expenditure, and existing infrastructure is maintained through 'non-plan' expenditure. According to the Ministry document, 'non-plan' expenditure now constitutes over 85 per cent of the total educational expenditure. Most of the 'plan' funding comes from the Centre, which spends about half its education budget this way. More than 85 per cent of the money spent by states comes under 'non-plan'. Thus, the Centre and the states play two distinct roles in the business of education: the Centre's main role is to shape new directions for development, whereas the main role of the states is to keep the system going. For seeking the Centre's help in launching new projects of qualitative importance, the states must satisfy the Centre's conditions, including a condition that the schemes to be undertaken will have an inter-state or national significance. Such a *priori* conditions cripple what little perception stated-level planners could show in identifying local needs in different parts of the state. As the case of Punjab referred to by Barker [1976] shows, state planners cook up schemes that would fit the Centre's bill of fare, and actually drop the state's own priorities. This is how education is made to serve the cause of national integration.

This critique of the present structure of Centre-state relationship should not be interpreted to infer that if the Centre gave aid without strings attached, the states would automatically become creative and perceptive in designing innovative projects. Nothing of this sort would happen unless the entire structure of decision-making in education becomes decentralised. And even this condition must look quite stale now that 'decentralisation' in a functional sense implies no more than involving local level bureaucrats. Educational priorities cannot be adequately determined without the participation of the community. In a truly decentralised set up in India, it is the oppressed majority, not the bureaucracy,

whose viewpoint should count for choosing direction for educational development. The rapid increase of bureaucratic roles and powers in the post-independence period has deprived the majority of Indian people of any powers for the task of shaping their own children's future.

I am grateful to Jadhya B G Tilak for commenting on an earlier draft of this article.]

References

Azad, J L: "State Grant to" Collegiate

Institutions — A Study of Patterns and Procedures", *Journal of Higher Education*, 22 (Autumn 1976): 243-252.

Baker, M Abu: "The Union and the States in Education", New Delhi, Shabd Sanchar, 1976

loud, Jean: "Education and Equality: A Perspective from the West" *Journal of Higher Education*. 1 (Autumn 1975): 199-209,

Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber and Rudolph. Lloyd I, (eds) "Education and Politics in India", Delhi, Oxford University Press. 1972.

labour and raw material the two state governments have been forced to offer concessional finance and land. Haryana has reserved 20 per cent of its plots in industrial estates for sale at concessional prices to non-resident Indians. Punjab is offering exemptions from electricity duties, soft loans for pre-investment surveys and a 15 per cent cash subsidy. The fact remains that Haryana has more than 70 industrial estates and plans to have another 100. There isn't exactly a long queue of people eager for plots in these estates. This has forced the government into making a virtue out of necessity by offering the plots at a concession. As for the various financial inducements, the two governments just do not have the money to carry them through. Punjab began the new financial year with an overdraft of Rs 90 crore which forced a sharp exchange of words between it and the Reserve Bank. Its current budget was drawn up with a deficit of Rs 113 crore. It has struggled to raise, additional resources worth Rs 400 crore for investment in the Sixth Plan but is showing every indication of frittering more than this away on non-Plan expenditure. Indeed the Centre, imbued with current ideas of cutting coats to suit the cloth, has asked the Punjab government to cut down the size of its Plan since it cannot seem to make both ends meet.

The spectre of stagnation seems to be haunting the corridors of Corbusier' Secretariat in Chandigarh. It is a spectre because stagnation is taking place despite the plenty all around. The two states have per capita incomes among the top three in the country. The Green Revolution has brought prosperity to the countryside. Farmers in Pierre Cardin suits driving tractors with shotguns strapped to their backs are not an uncommon sight. There is more than one chicken in some pots with the countryside literally covered with double and triple storey chicken runs.

The trouble is the Green Revolution has put the accounts of the state governments in the red. It continues to do so because it is considered impolitic to change horses in midstream. The terms of trade between town and countryside are being "reversed" for the benefit of the few. Take Punjab for instance. Direct subsidies to agriculture amount to Rs 17 crore per year. Indirect subsidies, in the form of cheap power and irrigation rates, push this figure up to Rs 70 crore a year. Power is supplied to about 3 lakh rural

THE NORTH

Subsidising to Bankruptcy

A N S

BOTH Punjab and Haryana have suddenly realised the urgent need for industrialisation. Early last month, the Haryana government announced the resurrection' of its moribund 'industrial assistance group' scheme which promises much milk and honey (through 'one window') to those desirous or investing in industrial ventures' in the state. Early this month the Chief Minister of Haryana hied himself off to the fleshpots of Europe and America ostensibly to won Indian emigres into investing their nest eggs in industrial ventures back home in Haryana (the number of Haryanvi emigres is minuscule). Not to be outdone, the Punjab government opened an 'Udyog Sahayak' with much fanfare inwards the middle of August. This too, promised great quantities of milk and honey to potential industrial investors. Haryana has labelled its venture into the realms of manufacture the 'aiye jee policy. Punjab is still groping around for a suitably catchy label. Now tiny Himachal Pradesh has also joined the three ring circus.

The package of incentives offered by the state governments is largely a window dressing for what has long been available to those investing in industry in backward regions. Punjab has, for instance, promised to waive 20 per cent of the income derived from new ventures from income tax for a period of five years — a Central incentive available to investors in backward regions anywhere in the country. The major new development is the cutting down of red tape by channeling all files and applications through 'one window'. This would considerably reduce the mandatory visits to waiting

in numerous government departments.

The fact remains, however, that there is very little milk and honey available after meeting the needs of agriculture (more of this later). Himachal Pradesh can, of course, be written off at the outset. It has a small surplus of power and a big potential in this input but its budget revenues are currently just about enough to cover the salaries of the government employees.

Of the three basic requirements for industry — raw materials, labour and a market — Punjab and Haryana only possess one a relatively affluent rural market. But this market seems to be satisfied largely with the conspicuous consumption of whiskey and chicken (in the case of Haryana even the chicken is optional). The market for industrial goods in any case appears to be mainly satisfied by products made elsewhere in India. The two states have no natural resources to speak of — not even enough water or coal to produce electricity. As for skilled labour, or labour of any sort, a considerable number of hands seem to have sought more lucrative pastures either elsewhere in the country or even abroad. This has led to the well-known phenomenon of bonded labour in the rural areas where big landlords literally kidnap migrant workers from UP and Bihar and tie them up at night for fear that they will decamp. (The latter phenomenon has prompted less serious students of political economy to conclude that the highest stage of agricultural capitalism in Punjab and Haryana is feudalism.)

Lacking both a sufficient quantity of